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DEPARTMENT FOR A/S FRAZER, S/E WILLIAMSON, AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KPKO SU

SUBJECT: NCP DELIBERATES ON U.S. NON-PAPER

REF: A. KHARTOUM 338

- 1B. KHARTOUM 312
- 1C. KHARTOUM 300
- 1D. KHARTOUM 297

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. C) Summary: In responding to an U.S. non-paper on changed Sudanese behavior which could lead to the possibility of improving U.S-Sudan relations, the NCP is likely to propose confidence-building measures regarding the Sudanese and U.S. Embassies. However the NCP's primary objective is to get off the List of State Sponsors of Terrorism and to negotiate an easing of sanctions, which will give the regime legitimacy and strengthen its hand vis-a-vis other political forces in Sudan. End summary.

12. (C) "Everyone in the NCP is for reaching a deal and improving relations with the U.S." according to senior NCP negotiator Yahia Bebiker, who participated as part of Dr. Nafie Ali Nafie's team in meetings with SE Williamson during his visit to Sudan. During a meeting with polchief March 10 Bebiker said there are many skeptics in the NCP and "no one is optimistic that this initiative will be a success right away." Bebiker said the entire drafting committee is also relatively cautious "with history in the backs of their minds" given the many failed initiatives in the past. Bebiker is on the drafting committee that will respond to the white paper. He said the GOS response would be forthcoming "before the end of next week" and that Senior Presidential Advisor Nafie Ali Nafie returns to Sudan 3/10, Mustafa Othman Ismail on 3/11 and they will convene a meeting 3/12 to discuss progress on the response.

13. (C) Bebiker said the NCP response will likely propose confidence-building measures that will focus on each country's embassy. "The Embassies can be a good start if we solve each other's problems," offered Bebiker. For example, if the U.S. helps solve the financial and auditing problems the Sudanese Embassy in Washington is facing, Sudan would release the containers for the NEC.

14. (C) However the primary issue of interest to the Sudanese is getting off the List of State Sponsors of Terrorism. Bebiker was part of the team that participated in consultations between U/S Pickering and then MFA Mustafa Othman Ismail in 1999 to review what it would take to remove Sudan from the list at that time. Bebiker claimed Sudan had long since met the "cook book" of requirements including demonstrating that it did not harbor, train, or finance terrorist organizations "in the last six months." Bebiker also pointed out that getting Sudan off the list will help with implementation of the CPA - since the U.S. is currently barred from providing assistance to the JIUS made up of SAF and SPLA units guarding sensitive border areas between North

and South Sudan.

¶15. (C) The NCP is obviously also eager to see an easing of economic sanctions. Bebiker said the Sudanese believe that even a slight lifting of economic sanctions would help Sudan, for example by allowing it to gain access to soft loans from the World Bank.

¶16. (C) Normalizing relations with the U.S. and the world is the primary objective of the NCP, according to Bebiker. Yahia said the NCP was pleased that SE Williamson said he wants to deal with the "legitimate and sovereign government of Sudan." "Unfortunately it was behind closed doors and we will also want a public improvement in relations." The NCP believes that even a small improvement in relations with the U.S. will send a signal to the SPLM and the rebel movements in Darfur that they should work with the NCP. "Otherwise they see that the U.S. may still be for regime change, so why should they work with the NCP?"

¶17. (C) Regarding NCP-SPLM dynamics, Bebiker claimed that negotiations on Abyei are going "very well" and that there is now a proposed plan for "phase one" that will include both interim borders and an interim administration for Abyei. This tracks with what others in the leadership of both parties are saying but not with the "cannon fodder" of the Misseriyya Arabs being used by Khartoum to pressure the SPLA in Abyei. Regarding elections, Bebiker said the NCP needs elections in 2009 to gain legitimacy and improve its standing vis-a-vis the other parties. Bebiker said the NCP believes the SPLM does not want elections because they haven't yet completed their transition as a political party and they haven't yet provided enough services to the South. Bebiker said the NCP is getting the impression that the EU also has "cold feet" on elections given the aftermath of the elections in Kenya.

¶18. (C) Comment: Bebiker was relatively honest in his assessment of what Sudan hopes to gain from this latest effort at improving U.S.-Sudan relations. Even a slight improvement in relations with the U.S. would strengthen the NCP in relation to other political forces in Sudan. The mere fact of our current engagement has improved our working relationship with the NCP and the regime, but this will end suddenly and possibly dramatically if no progress is made. Based on the emphasis of the discussion, it is clear that removing Sudan from the List of State Sponsors of Terrorism is the NCP regime's primary objective, and the regime hopes that other improvements such as an easing of economic sanctions will flow from that. The regime would gladly make progress on Darfur and the CPA if it can achieve these objectives, but the questions for U.S. policymakers remain how much progress must be made in Darfur and on the CPA in order to offer something serious in exchange, and will there be enough time to fully achieve these objectives? Given the complexity and pace of events in Darfur and on the CPA, the answer is probably not, so we will see what tangible interim steps may be gleaned from the Sudanese response that will allow us to continue to engage credibly with this regime. Given the nature of issues in Sudan, most agreements, even if initially kept, are reversible. Progress on building the NEC is a notable case in point. End comment.

FERNANDEZ